

Field Report

Colorado National Monument

■ 1.0 Summary

Colorado National Monument preserves one of the grand landscapes of the American West. John Otto was one of the first persons to realize that the beautiful landscape was one to be preserved when he wrote in 1907: “I came here last year and found these canyons, and they felt like the heart of the world to me.” Through his and others’ hard work, Colorado National Monument was established in 1911. The plateau-and-canyon country covers 32 square miles of rugged, up-and-down terrain. The main visitor attractions at the monument include the Visitor Center; the canyons and geological formations; the pull out viewpoint areas; and special events at the campgrounds and near the Visitor Center.

The major problems at Colorado National Monument are that in order to see the Park one must use a car and that there is no transit service to or through the Park. Additionally, as the Grand Junction and Fruita areas grow, Colorado National Monument will experience levels of congestion that may detract from the visitor experience and become unsafe at pull out areas and popular viewpoint areas. No major improvements can be made to the internal roadway, Rim Rock Drive, since the actual road is on the National Register of Historic Structures. Rim Rock Drive itself is a historic feature since it was constructed as part of the work completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the early twentieth century.

With one access point on the east near Grand Junction and one access point on the west near Fruita, Colorado National Monument is in need of some minor alternative transportation system (ATS) solutions. Most solutions involve transit-related improvements. Bicycle lanes and/or paths along Rim Rock Drive are not feasible since the roadway would have to be widened and therefore would affect the historic nature of the roadway. Feasible ATS alternatives for Colorado National Monument include:

- A regular route or on-demand transit service from the city of Grand Junction to the Colorado National Monument access point on the east side of the Park;
- A regular route or on-demand transit service from the city of Fruita to the Colorado National Monument access point on the west side of the Park; and
- A regular route or on-demand transit service that penetrates Colorado National Monument from the east and/or west access points into the Park and stopping at major attractions, such as the Visitor Center and campgrounds, and the major viewpoints and overlooks.

■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

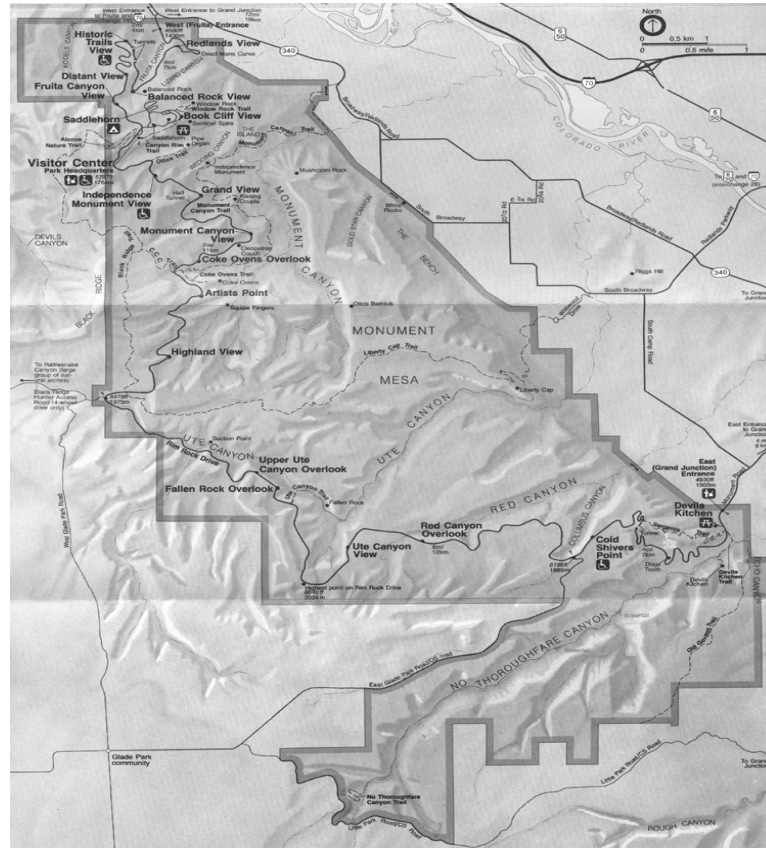
Rising 2,000 feet above the fertile Grand Valley in western Colorado, Colorado National Monument overlooks the towns of Grand Junction and Fruita, Colorado. Access to Colorado National Monument on the west side is gained from the city of Fruita, access on the east side is gained from the city of Grand Junction.

2.2 Administration and Classification

Colorado National Monument is designated as a National Monument and is managed by the Department of Interior's NPS. Colorado National Monument's Superintendent is Steve Hickman.

2.3 Physical Description

Colorado National Monument preserves 32 square miles of canyon and plateau land in western Colorado. Vehicular transportation through the Park is by way of Rim Rock Drive, a 23 mile long two-lane highway that is on the National Register of Historic Structures. Rim Rock Drive climbs from Grand Valley to the Park's high country, offering spectacular views of the valley below. (See Figure 1 for a map of Colorado National Monument.)

Figure 1. Map of Colorado National Monument

2.4 Mission and Goals of Colorado National Monument

Colorado National Monument was established as a National Monument in 1911 by a Presidential directive. The goal was to preserve the special geography of the plateaus and canyon lands.

The mission of Colorado National Monument and the NPS is the “Protection and Preservation of the natural environment to ensure the ecosystem integrity while providing for visitor enjoyment.” Preservation and protection are not limited to only the natural environment. Preservation and protection extends to include natural, cultural, and recreation management.

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

Colorado National Monument had a total of 528,964 visitors in 1998. Of these, 237,274 visitors were commuters traveling through the Park to the residential area of Glade Park. This non-recreational use accounted for 44 percent of the total visitors in 1998.

The average recreational user in Colorado National Monument spends an average of two hours in the Park. Of these, 90 percent of the users never leave their vehicle. Much of the recreation use in the Park is traveling by automobile and stopping at various overlooks along Rim Rock Drive. Various recreational opportunities within the Park also include hiking, camping, bicycling, and rock climbing. A Visitor Center near the west entrance to the Park gives opportunities for guided walks, slide shows, and interpretation. The entrance center is located at the entrance to the designated campsites and amphitheater.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

There are no major issues or concerns affecting Colorado National Monument. Most of the issues deal with maintaining the historic roadway Rim Rock Drive and preserving the parkland for an excellent visitor experience. Currently, there are no improvements or changes planned for the transportation system within the Park. There are concerns of the encroaching land uses around Colorado National Monument. Most of this development is coming from the north (residential development), the east (one- to five-acre residential subdivisions), and the west (residential development). Land uses to the south of the Park are mostly BLM properties.

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The transportation concern for Colorado National Monument is to accommodate the number of users while at the same time create a positive visitor experience and preserve the resources of the Park. Most parking areas within the Park are not at over capacity, however there are several overlook areas that are often crowded. These overlooks include Independence and Cold Shivers Point. Additionally, the lower canyon trailheads, such as Devil's Kitchen, are often congested. Furthermore, the main park roadway (Rim Rock Drive) is listed on the National Register of Historic Structures. The historic nature of the roadway makes it nearly impossible to make any improvements to Rim Rock Drive beyond routine maintenance and minor roadway patching.

Average daily roadway volumes in 1996 in the vicinity of the heavy use roadway corridors of the city of Grand Junction, the city of Fruita, and Colorado National Monument were moderately high but did not significantly place the roadways at a capacity deficiency level. The 1996 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes were:

- 10,600 vehicles on Colorado State Highway 340 between Grand Junction and Fruita;
- 18,200 vehicles on Interstate 70 between Grand Junction and Fruita;
- 15,600 vehicles on U.S. Highway 6 near the city of Fruita; and
- 20,500 vehicles on U.S. Highway 50 near the city of Grand Junction.

Although the traffic volume levels are not high and the roadway level of service is operating in the area of “C,” the geometry and grade of some of the roadways are deficient in allowing visitors to access Colorado National Monument.

Overall there are safety and capacity concerns at pull outs and overlook parking areas within Colorado National Monument. Many of the more popular sites within the Park are increasingly congested and are beginning to have parking overcrowding problems. As Colorado National Monument visitation levels continue to increase the congestion and parking problems will become an issue that must be dealt with to provide safe and efficient movement through the Park. This is especially important at the east entrance to the Park where residents of the community of Glade Park use Rim Rock Drive to access East Glade Park Road and West Glade Park Road. Many of the residents of Glade Park travel on Rim Rock Drive every day and are accustomed to driving on narrow and winding roadways. This type of driver is unlike the many visitors to Colorado National Monument who are not accustomed to narrow roadways, drive slowly around curves, and are interested in stopping often to look at the views.

A windshield survey of parking facilities was taken during the site visit over the Labor Day holiday weekend and the results for existing parking supply within Colorado National Monument (see Table 1).

Currently, there are no planned improvements to the roadway or parking areas. The only scheduled roadway improvements are routine maintenance and pavement patching. A major transportation problem is there is no scheduled public transit to the park entrances. The lack of transit does not provide an opportunity for persons to view the Park that do not have a vehicle and provides no opportunity to relieve congestion on the roadways leading up to the park entrances, relieve congestion on Rim Rock Drive, and over capacity parking areas.

Although the paved Rim Rock Drive through the Park is a very scenic roadway, bicycling is very dangerous along this road because of the heavy volume of traffic, limited sight distances around curves, and the lack of shoulders along most of the roadway. Bicycle use in the Park is increasing and many times there are vehicle/bicycle conflicts along the roadway, especially from the east entrance to the East Glade Park Road. However, the opportunity to construct a bike lane along the roadway may not be possible due to the historic nature of Rim Rock Drive.

Table 1. Parking Supply at Colorado National Monument

Parking Location	Number of Parking Spaces	Parking Location Roadway Direction (Westbound/Eastbound)	Mile Point from East (Grand Junction) Park Entrance
<i>Parking Supply from East (Grand Junction) Entrance to West (Fruita) Entrance</i>			
East (Grand Junction) Entrance	5	Westbound and Eastbound	0.0
Devils Kitchen Trailhead	12 and 2 handicap	Eastbound	0.6
Pull Out Area	6	Eastbound	1.9
Pull Out Area	5	Eastbound	2.4
Cold Shivers Point	8 and 2 handicap	Westbound	3.2
Red Canyon Overlook	10	Westbound	6.1
Ute Canyon View	15	Westbound	6.7
Ute Canyon Trailhead	6	Westbound	8.6
Fallen Rock Overlook	20	Westbound	8.9
Upper Ute Canyon Overlook	15	Westbound	9.2
Liberty Cap Trailhead	15	Westbound	11.6
Highland View	15	Westbound	12.3
Artists Point	25	Westbound	13.5
Coke Ovens Trailhead	10	Westbound	14.0
Coke Ovens Overlook	10	Westbound	14.2
Monument Canyon View	6	Westbound	15.0
Grand View	20	Westbound	16.1
Independence Monument View	25	Westbound	16.7
Ottos Trailhead	8	Westbound	16.9
Visitor's Center Parking Lot	45 and 2 handicap	Westbound	17.8
Fruita Canyon View	10	Westbound	18.2
Distant View	10	Westbound	18.6
Historic Trails View	6	Eastbound	19.6
Balanced Rock View	5	Westbound	20.3
Redlands View	8	Eastbound	21.0
West (Fruita) Entrance	5	Eastbound	23.0
Parking Supply Subtotal	325 and 6 handicap		

Parking Location	Number of Parking Spaces	Mile Point from Main Roadway
<i>Parking Supply on Picnic Area and Campgrounds Road</i>		
Picnic Area	85	0.3
Window Rock Trail	5	0.7
Book Cliff View	6	1.2
Parking Supply Subtotal	96	

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Although there is an active planning process in the communities of Grand Junction and Fruita, there is no active partnership with Colorado National Monument and the adjoining towns. Colorado National Monument is looked upon as a separate element from the communities.

Colorado National Monument is concerned about the growth of Grand Junction on the eastern edge of the Park. Residential growth has been creeping up along the park boundary and may raise concern for visual impacts within the Park. In addition, there has been residential growth in the Glade Park area, increasing commuter traffic through the Park.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Colorado National Monument was formed because of the rugged rock formations and canyons. The Park strives to preserve these natural resources. In addition to natural resources, there are cultural resources within the Park such as Rim Rock Drive. Because Rim Rock Drive is on the National Register of Historic Structures, changes to this historic highway would be difficult. In addition to Rim Rock Drive, there are historic Civilian Conservation Corps sights within the Park that are significant culturally to the Park.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The goal of Colorado National Monument is to balance the needs and experiences of the visitor with the preservation and conservation of the natural and cultural resources within the Park. Several issues include:

- Congestion in areas such as the Devil’s Kitchen trailhead and the visitor center during peak times detracting the visitor experience;
- Accommodating different types of recreational users while protecting natural and cultural resources;
- Balancing the needs of the recreational user and the commuter; and
- Accommodating congestion within the Park during special events (running and bicycling events).

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Park Plans

There are no current transportation plans for Colorado National Monument. The park staff believes that at present, there are no needs for a transportation plan. In addition, there are no carrying capacity studies for the Park.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

Currently, there is no active coordination or partnership with Colorado National Monument and the adjoining cities of Grand Junction and Fruita. Overall, the cities view the Colorado National Monument as a separate entity. Neither city currently offers public transit to the entrance of the Park or through the Park. However, both Grand Junction and Fruita do welcome the visitors of Colorado National Monument to their respective cities. Additionally the main park road, Rim Rock Drive, is utilized on daily basis by many residents of Glade Park.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need and System Options

5.1 Magnitude of Need

There is a slight to moderate need for alternative transportation at Colorado National Monument. Alternative transportation could serve as a link from Colorado National Monument to the cities of Fruita and Grand Junction, cutting down on the number of private vehicles traveling through the Park as either commuters or visitors. In addition, alternative transportation may enhance the visitor experience within the Park by relieving congestion at popular viewpoints, overlooks, and trailhead parking lots.

5.2 Range of Feasible Transit Alternatives

There are feasible transit alternatives that could assist in providing an excellent visitor experience as well as move vehicles efficiently and safely into and through Colorado National Monument.

- Initiating regular transit service from the cities of Fruita and Grand Junction to both park entrances on the west and east sides of the Park where the transit vehicle could either continue into the Park or transfer transit riders to another transit vehicle which would then continue into the Park.

- If regular transit service is initiated, set policy direction on how the transit service would be operated and what areas within the Park the transit service would provide access to the transit riders.
- If regular transit service is initiated, provide transit shelters at the major viewing areas within the Park as well as the campground facilities near the Visitor Center.

5.3 General Transit System Considerations

Any transit system within Colorado National Monument should:

- Introduce the transit system gradually with a maximum of public information, education and support;
- Design the transit vehicles specifically to accommodate visitors carrying backpacks and supplies for hiking and camping;
- Include an interpretive narrative by the driver or have a park staff member on the transit vehicle to provide a narrative of park attractions;
- Utilize new technology to inform transit riders of the timing of the next transit vehicle arrival and other important information;
- Include detailed signs and maps indicating the route of the transit vehicle and the times of arrivals and departures of the vehicle;
- Utilize fuel that is clean and a vehicle that is quiet;
- Include transit shelters in order to provide protection from the weather;
- Include bicycle racks in the transit vehicles; and
- Integrate the Colorado National Monument transit service with any transit service that may be arriving from the cities of Fruita and Grand Junction.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

Colorado Department of Transportation. Internet site: <http://www.dot.state.co.us/>. Information printed September 1999.

Colorado National Monument. Internet site: <http://www.nps.gov/colm/>. Information printed August 1999.

■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Meeting Held September 9, 1999. Attendees: City of Fruita and Grand Junction planners

John Tordoff, Superintendent. Personal Interview. September 9, 1999